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Existing Materials, Current Style and Ecclesiastical Architecture in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Existing building materials coupled with the current style factor has been identified as one of the predominant determinants of ecclesiastical architecture. This study examined various emerging materials and architectural styles with a view to identify how and why these factors have affected the emergence and development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. The study area was Lagos State because of many reasons. Lagos State was noted as the cradle of Christian evolution and growth in Nigeria. It was a place that pioneered ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. Lagos State was arguably one of the most Christian religious cities in the world having a long history of Independent African Churches dating back to the time of the great influenza epidemic of 1918. Since this study was a theoretical research and historical in nature, qualitative methods in form of literature, unstructured interview and non-participant observation were employed to gather the data and analysis was done by description and content analysis. The study found that building materials and the architectural styles carried theological, liturgical and spiritual meanings of the Church at different times and in different denominations. Each Church determined the choice of materials and style to augment the preached word. This study concluded that these factors carried meanings that were capable to fulfil the mission, vision and the aspirations of various Churches at various times.

Keywords: Existing Materials, current style, ecclesiastical architecture, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The development of ecclesiastical architecture has undergone many phases and styles since its emergence in the Roman Empire in 313AD and many building materials and architectural styles have evolved due to a number of influences. From period to period, different characteristics of the church buildings showed some significant changes that made them epochal. In trying to differentiate one style from the other, there arose this long standing attempt to classify ecclesiastical architecture styles generally by morphological characteristics in terms of periods, techniques, forms and materials (Palmes, 1975). The historical process that brought about ecclesiastical architecture was not without a number of predominant determinants as it underwent those kaleidoscopic changes in its transformations. Many studies have identified these determinants and existing building material with the current architectural style was one of them. Others were theology with liturgy, free expression of styles with the knowledge of the “masters” and moving with time like the Evangelical ways. One other school of thought opined that elaborate investment in ecclesiastical architecture was tantamount to heresy or apostasy and that the Church was never given the responsibility of constructing buildings.

This study examined the factor of existing building materials with the current architectural styles with a view to identifying how and why this factor influenced the emergence and development during each phase of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria. Adeboye (2009) identified three phases of ecclesiastical architecture development in Nigeria since its emergence in 1845 and up to 2005. The first phase was between 1845 and 1930 and the second phase was between 1930 and 1980 while the third phase was between 1980 and 2005. One church building from each of the three phases was selected for investigation in this study. Since this study is historical and qualitative in nature qualitative methods in form of unstructured interview, literature and non-participant observation in case study were employed to gather the data. The data were analysed by descriptions and content analysis. In the context of this study, existing materials comprised of all building substances of all the components of the church buildings and current style referred to all architectural forms adopted for the church buildings.

Lagos State was chosen as the study area because of a number of reasons. This study area was identified as the cradle of Christian evolution and development in Nigeria. The foreign Christian groups first succeeded in entering Nigeria through Badagry before proceeding to other parts of the country (Hildebrandt, 1981). Lagos State pioneered Christianity in Nigeria and ecclesiastical architecture was inadvertently a product of that process because the Church found in architecture an expression of their vision and aspiration as the first church building was erected in Badagry in 1845 (Adekunle (2007). Lagos State was arguably the most Christian religious city in the world having a long history of Independent African Churches that emphasized spiritual gifts, dating back to the

time of the great influenza epidemic of 1918 (Anderson, 2002). The metropolitan mega city nature of Lagos gives an impetus to the flourishing of the spread of religious activities because Christianity development has become an urban phenomenon (Anderson, 2002). The cosmopolitan structure of Lagos accommodates the influence of every Nigerian tribe (Census 2006).

2. Literature Review

Many studies identified the building materials and the current architectural style should be a dominant determinant in considering the procurement of ecclesiastical architecture. Dietsch (2002) noted that architecture constantly evolved to reflect the accomplishments of civilizations in all corners of the world as it recorded the cultural, social, religious, and political ambitions in three dimensions. Each building represented the era in which it was built as the understanding of the symbolic meaning related to the structure and style to a particular period in history. The study noted one of the sayings of Winston Churchill, which noted that people shape their environment and afterwards their environment shape them as architecture has a profound effect on the lives and souls of people.

Jansen (2010) observed that one essential aspect of early Christian religious architecture initially attached no theological meaning to materials because the plain brick exterior remained deliberately unadorned and plain as it was merely a shell whose shape reflected the interior space it enclosed. It was the exact opposite of the Classical temple whose interior was in form of a shimmering realm of light and colour where precious marble surfaced and the brilliant glitter of mosaics evoked the spiritual splendour. Unlike its pagan predecessors, the Classical temple showed a clear separation of the interior space into a domed cylindrical core lit by clerestory windows. The mosaic decoration played an essential part in setting the mood of the interior.

Farber (2014) also noted that during the early period, initially, there was not much distinction between the Christian church buildings and typical domestic architecture, Constantine and his architects took a dramatic turn and confronted a major challenge of how the physical form of the church building should be. The difference between pagan and Roman temples was that the pagan temples served as treasuries and dwellings for the cult and sacrifices occurred on outdoor altars with the temple as a backdrop. This meant that Roman temple architecture was largely architecture of the exterior. Since Christianity was considered a mystery religion that demanded initiation to participate in religious practices, the study showed that Christian architecture put greater emphasis on the interior. The Christian churches needed large interior spaces celebrating the current materials and style to house the growing congregations and to mark the clear separation of the faithful from the unfaithful. At the same time, the new Christian churches needed to be visually meaningful being expressed in materials. The buildings needed to convey the new authority of Christianity.

Wikipedia (2015) observed that in the 20th century, the use of new materials, such as steel and concrete, had an effect upon the church designs. Locally available materials and the same skills of construction as the local domestic buildings were employed. A simple church was built of mud brick, wattle and daub, split logs or rubble and roofed with thatch, shingles, corrugated iron or banana leaves. Availability and durability were the main determinants of the later development coupled but with theological meanings. Such church buildings were often built of the most durable materials which were often dressed stone or brick because God was considered everlasting. Apart from changes in the liturgy, the other major influence on church architecture was in the use of new materials and the development of new techniques but after the Second World War, modern materials and techniques such as concrete and metal panels were introduced. Available building materials found at different locations played a major role as the material employed in the earliest buildings constructed around Rome was "tuff", a volcanic rock of varying hardness although some soft enough to be worked with bronze tools. Later, other harder volcanic stones were used, such as "peperino" and "albani" stone from the nearby Alban hills (Boardman, 2014).

Cracked (2015), Tom (2012), Ghodke (2014) and Islamia (2014) identified geological influences which produced the building materials and had no theological determination acted indirectly on early Christian architecture because the ruins of Roman building often provided the quarry. This influenced the style, both as regards construction and decoration. The studies noted that this general use of brickwork in Byzantine necessitated special care in making mortar, which was made of lime and sand with crushed pottery, tiles, or bricks, and much of it remained as hard as that in the buildings of Rome, while the core of the wall was sometimes of concrete, as in the Roman period. The decorative character of external facades depended largely on the arrangement of the facing bricks, which were not always laid horizontally, but sometimes obliquely, sometimes in the form of the "meander fret", sometimes in the "chevron" or herringbone pattern, and in many other similar designs, giving great variety to the facades (Smolinskiel, 2013).

Barnes (2015) noted that of all the aspects of design and building style to consider, the most important aspect should be the vision of the Church as it is the architect's responsibility to come under this "umbrella of spiritual authority" to use appropriate materials to design something that should truly reflect the vision because the ultimate relationship between the architect and the parishioners should not be formed at the end of the project, but rather at the beginning. The study noted that the building materials and architectural style of the Church should express the identification and personality of the church as the type of architecture could clearly provide an element of identification. The personality, mission, vision, and styles of worship could be expressly communicated through architectural design. The actual design of the building structures could, in fact, speak volumes regarding the identity of the church worshipping within the building. Although it could take bricks and mortar to build a church facility, the process could be far more than just physical building materials but a definitive spiritual process.

Jayson (2015) observed that during the Middle Ages, Christians introduced large-scale, coloured art glass windows, bringing light, colour, beauty, and a heightened sense of the divine into houses of worship but the Gothic stained glass style played a role offering Christian scenes through intricate design and inspiring colour and light and these windows shared the teachings of faith with all worshippers, whether literate or not. The study noted that the philosophy of Divine Light reasoned that humans could spiritually experience God through natural light brought in through vivid, large-scale windows of art glass. This connection between the

daylighting capabilities of art glass and the worshippers' perceived spiritual experience could also be attributed to the "crown" and "cylinder" glass production methods themselves. One of the most debated facts about Noah's ark was the type of wood that was used to build it. The ark was considered a type of a contemporary church building. The King James Bible called it "gopher wood," but trees by that name has not been currently identified. The study noted that some scholars argued that the material could not have withstood the size and current forces of the flood and therefore could have been spiritually supported (Zavada, 2015).

Stroik (2014) noted that a church building for the poor should be seen as a place for full-blooded laypeople who needed to be drawn into the building through material and tactile means. It should not be a modernist structure inspired by the machine because the poor were usually surrounded and even enslaved by the machine and the technologies in factories but rather it should be a building inspired by the human body and the richness of creation. The poor needed architecture of soul healing, which through proportions, materials and spiritual light bring joy to the heart. The poor may not often visit the art museum, the symphony hall, or the stately hotel because they could not afford to pay but a worthy church building could give the poor the same experience of art, fine music, and nobility that the rich and middle class would happily pay for.

Eldar (2001) observed that the design of church buildings was influenced as much by the religious traditions of the individual Christian community as much as the building materials and methods and architectural styles current at the time of construction. In some cases there were repeated re-use of older stone work and architectural elements. Almost all early Christian architects borrowed heavily from the precedence whatever the regional culture of the individual community as the various chapels were furnished and decorated according to the customs and rites of the religious community holding possession. Architect Norman L. Koonce in considering the spiritual and theological meaning of building materials and architectural style postulated that the goal of sacred architecture was to make "transparent the boundary between matter and mind, flesh and the spirit" (Wikipedia, 2014).

McKeough (2015) and Demetrescu (2000) noted that the architecture that transforms raw and earthly materials into compositions could be so powerful to evoke something beyond the natural world. Notre Dame du Haut chapel at Ronchamp in France, for example, was not just a place of spiritual pilgrimage but an architectural pilgrimage. In sacred architecture, in addition to the material stability of the building, there could be the symbolism of its spiritual function as the church building should not be considered a work of engineering but a spiritual symbol. To see the church building as only a material structure is like deconsecrating it or emptying it of its fundamental significance as a symbol. Garkavenko (2014) noted that as the beginning of civilization started with a series of material innovations, it makes sense that the history of architecture was also deeply engrained in technological developments. Manufacturing and industry have been at the forefront of the exploration of materials and their applications as the growth of products for the physical realization of architectural projects seems to grow exponentially, in lockstep with advances in technology for the culture at large (Barley, 2013).

3. Findings and Analysis

After the missionaries won some converts to Christianity, there was the need to establish a centre where to teach them the Bible. They therefore created what could be considered as organic architecture under an 'Agia' tree in Badagry. The floor was the natural ground, the foliage provided the roof and it was wall-less. Further development led to another site where a traditional church building was erected with local materials. It had bamboo walls and thatched roof. All these were adopted for theological and liturgical purposes. At that time the Anglican Missionaries had brought with them to Badagry a two storey prefabricated timber house from Sierra Leone in 1852 with a similar house built in Lagos and another one in Ibadan two years later. This form of construction was dictated by the concept of creating a status for the missionaries, as the alternative was mud with thatch since the brick construction was comparatively expensive. The model became a prototype for the first set of colonial buildings described by Mary Kingsley (1862-1900) as "abominations" because of their noisy roofs and open verandas. Further quest for development later produced the St. Thomas Anglican Church, Badagry which was built in 1845 in Gothic style and it became the first church in Nigeria pioneering ecclesiastical architecture.

Since there was no precedence before St Thomas building to borrow from, the first phase of the emergence and development of ecclesiastical architecture in Nigeria owed its choice of building materials and architectural style to the Mission Groups that succeeded in establishing Christianity in Nigeria. Initially, there was heavy reliance on importation of major building materials like bricks, iron and timber which were imported from Europe and America. Construction funds too were mainly sourced from the parent Churches. The church building sizes were usually small comparatively as the Churches maximum sitting capacity was 500 worshippers. The leadership of the Churches was controlled by foreign Missionaries and the church projects were funded by the parent bodies. Early ecclesiastical architecture period, was characterised by various types of Gothic style. Apart from it being engineering and decorative solutions during its own time, the verticality of the style suggested an aspiration of the soul to Heaven. If any architecture expressed spiritual ideals, it would be in the lofty Gothic. It was considered a style that humbled man and glorified God. Its architecture was not merely about ornamentation, but it was generally perceived that the Gothic style brought meaning to the existing materials through innovative new construction techniques that allowed churches and other buildings to reach great heights.



Figure 1: Approach View

Holy Cross Catholic Cathedral, Catholic Mission Street, Tafawabalewa Square, Lagos (First constructed in 1897 but re-constructed in 1932)



Figure 2: Stained glass window

The second phase witnessed the emergence of African Independent Churches and Pentecostals coupled with a gradual transformation of the leadership of the Mission established Churches to indigenes. Experimentation of new materials and styles characterized the period because Nigeria had opened her door to globalization. Although, the Church borrowed from precedence and at the same time new technologies were being introduced gradually, thereby departing from Gothic which took a long time to construct and cost per sitting capacity was comparatively high. The period enjoyed patronage of local materials and indigenous artisans with professional input.



Figure 3: Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Yaba, Lagos (1965)

Source: Fieldwork in 2007

The third phase was characterized by accelerating fragmentation of denominations, creating several different religious traditions. The period witnessed the rise of both liberal and conservative splinter groups, as well as a general secularization of the society. While the Catholic and Orthodox/Protestant Churches still attached liturgical and theological meanings to the materials and styles of architecture of their church buildings, the Pentecostals focus was on adopted material architecture for theological and liturgical purposes with visual connection and acoustic comfort. Pentecostals were particularly attracted to the auditorium and theatre types of plan layout because of their scientific claims to acoustical and visual correctness, as well as the belief that the choice of material and style for a building should be determined by its theological and liturgical functions. The industrial revolution products dominated the period because the Church could not be left behind in the clamour for modernization of their buildings. Materials like aluminium, glass, plastics, concrete, bricks, timber, steel and tiles all combine to make the period architectural experimental.

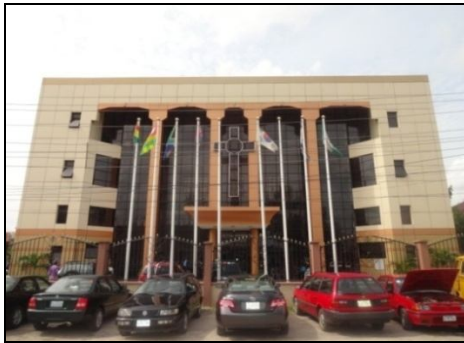


Figure 4: Approach View



Figure 5: Left side view and part of approach

Source: Fieldwork in 2014

4. Conclusion

This study concluded that while building materials and various styles were physical evidence, they carried meanings to fulfil the mission, vision and the aspirations of the Church at various times whether the meanings were theological and liturgical or not..

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